



Tip of the

Prevention Information from CSAP's Western Center for the Application of Prevention Technologies

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Program Fidelity and Adaptation in Substance Abuse Prevention

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One of the most difficult challenges to effective substance abuse prevention is finding the right balance between maintaining the fidelity of a science-based model prevention program, and promoting adaptation of that program to reflect the circumstance of the community where it is being implemented. The Center for Substance Abuse Prevention, through its National Center for the Advancement of Prevention, is taking a leadership role in:

1. synthesizing the knowledge base on this important subject
2. mobilizing those audiences (program developers; the prevention practitioners and community leaders who implement the programs; researchers; funders; and public policymakers) to address the need for balance in more rigorous and practical ways.

Finding the Balance: Program Fidelity and Adaptation in Substance Abuse Prevention – A State of the Art Review was recently prepared for CSAP. It surveyed 125 published and unpublished studies related to fidelity and adaptation balance, spanning more than 25 years. To download a full copy of this report, please go to the following web-site address:

<http://www.samhsa.gov/centers/csap/modelprograms/pdfs/FindingBalance1.pdf>.

This report first defines several key terms and then reviews the relevant research in some detail. It then presents several conclusions drawn from the literature review. The fundamental conclusion is that attention to BOTH program fidelity and adaptation during the complex process of program implementation is critical to successful, sustained implementation of science-based substance abuse prevention programs.

In addition, this paper proposes an initial set of guidelines (see below) for program implementers and also several unresolved issues that require attention from each of the primary audiences for this work. The paper concludes with a consideration of next steps for CSAP and others in order to advance the understanding of program fidelity and adaptation balance in substance abuse prevention. Six guidelines for balancing program fidelity and adaptation:

1. Identify and understand the theory base behind the program.
2. Obtain or conduct a core components analysis of the program.
3. Assess fidelity/adaptation concerns for the particular implementation site.
4. Consult as need with the program developer to review the above steps and how they have shaped a plan for implementing the program in a particular setting.
5. Consult with the organization and/or community in which the implementation will take place.
6. Develop an overall implementation plan based on these inputs.

The better we understand the complexities of fidelity and adaptation balance, the more strategically we can approach these issues in our work - and the better the prevention field as a whole can deal with the challenges of balancing program fidelity and adaptation.

The six regional CAPTs are funded by the Center for Substance Abuse Prevention in the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. For more information on this Tip of the CAPT or other Western CAPT services, please visit our web site: www.westcapt.org or our best practices website: www.open.org/westcapt.

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